

May Attack if Pushed in Chad, Mitterrand Says

But French President Stresses He's Keeping Door Open to Negotiate an End to Civil War

By DON COOK, *Times Staff Writer*

PARIS—President Francois Mitterrand warned Thursday that French troops in Chad might take the offensive if attacked, but he also sought to keep the way open to a negotiated settlement of the civil war there.

In his first direct public statement on the current Chad crisis, Mitterrand said that if the 2,000 French troops now stationed in Chad are threatened, "in order to defend themselves better, they will not limit their response only to defensive action."

But in an indirect warning to the Chad government, Mitterrand said that French forces will not be

pushed into any action that France disagrees with. Chadian leaders have been calling for French support for a new offensive northward to clear the Libyan-backed rebels under former President Goukouni Oueddei from the key town of Faya-Largeau. Since the French began arriving in Chad, the fighting has subsided into stalemate.

In a long interview with the newspaper *Le Monde*, Mitterrand also sought to tone down differences with the Reagan Administration, the subject of public bitterness recently. "Let's not allow the trees to get in the way of the forest," he said. "Let's say that we did not ignore the Americans who were very concerned, together with us, yes very. It's all a question of degree. I think that everything is back in order now."

Mitterrand disclosed that he had met secretly with a special envoy sent by President Reagan, former deputy CIA director Vernon D. Walters. The meeting is believed to have taken place at Mitterrand's country residence at Latche in southwest France on Aug. 7, about the time that American AWACS radar surveillance planes were being ordered to Sudan to watch the Libyan-backed advance.